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ABSTRACT

Research in contrastive linguistics suggests that in the teaching of English pronunciation to native speakers of Spanish, it is important for teachers to consider the aspects of each language expressed through different suprasegmentals, or prosodic features. What is often stated at the syntactic and/or lexical levels in Spanish is expressed in English only at the phonological level. In addition to awareness of sounds occurring in one language that are lacking in the other, phonemically distinct sounds in one language that are only phonetic variants in the other, and differences in patterns of phonological occurrence, teachers must add a heightened awareness of the consequences of the prosodic features of phonology. It is in this area that many lexico-semantic elements of one language find their semantic equivalents in the other. In pronunciation instruction, as much attention should be paid to the prosodics of phonology as to the general sound characterization of pronunciation. (MSE)

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A CONTRASTIVE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF PRONUNCIATION IN ESL CLASSES

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A Contrastive Approach to the Teaching of Pronunciation in ESL Classes.

No one would claim that there is a one-to-one relationship between languages and social systems. Yet there are many who believe it possible to analyze the systems of two languages as mere parallels. Since the adoption of the term *contrastive linguistics* to describe a certain type of comparison between two or more languages, this field of linguistic analysis has been subjected to both great expectations and severe criticism. Most of the recent literature concerning contrastive analysis gives the impression that contrastive linguistics is in the grip of a severe crisis after a boom in the early 1960's. Yet the crisis, if there is one, exists at the level of theoretical discussion only, for constrative linguistics has progressed rapidly at various centers of active research, centers such as the German-English PAKS in Kiel, and later in Stuttgart; the Polish-English project in Poznan; the Serbo-Croatian-English project in Zagreb, the Romanian-English project in Bucharest and the Hungarian-English project in Budapest.

Since the term *contrastive linguistics* encompasses both theoretical and contrastive applied studies it might be useful, at this point, to review the differences between the two. Theoretical contrastive studies are language independent, they do not investigate how a given category present in language A is presented in language B, but rather look for the realization of universal category X in both A and B. Thus, theoretical contrastive linguistic studies do not have a direction from A to B or vice versa, but rather flow from X to A and from X to B. In other words, they specifiy how a given universal category is realized in the contrasted languages.

In phonology, for example, theoretical contrastive studies operate with phonological primes, that is, features, and they specify how these features function in the two or more languages being compared.

Applied contrastive studies, on the other hand, are part of applied linguistics. Drawing on the findings of theoretical contrastive studies they provide a framework for the comparison of languages, selecting whatever information is necessary for a specific purpose, e.g. teaching, bilingual analysis, translations, etc. Applied contrastive studies, then, are preoccupied with the problem of how a universal category X, realized in language A as Y, is rendered in language B, and what may be the possible consequences of this for a given field of application.

Whereas great attention is focused on the general sound characterization of pronunciation in the teaching of English to Spanish-speakers the significance of the prosodic features of the phonological component of English has been overlooked. (In the American tradition of phonological analysis, such features as pitch, stress and juncture have been called **suprasegmentals**, while in the European schools, they are often referred to as **prosodics**. In this paper, the latter term will be used throughout.) It is my contention that the prosodic features of the phonological component of English are as important as the rules of phonetic characterization for converting underlying grammatical structure into patterns of sound. Since I do not intend this to be a theoretical paper but am concerned rather with the relevance and utility of this observation in the teaching of English to Spanish speakers, I shall illustrate the linguistic justification for my assertion by presenting selective contrastive data equating prosodic features of English pronunciation with required lexico-syntactic changes in Spanish. If the hypothestis of applied contrastive linguistics is as Carrol noted, "wherever there are similarities, learning may be retarded or

interfered with," (Carrol 1968: 114) the purpose of such data is to delineate and thereby help diminish possible areas of LI interference for Spanish speakers studying ESL.

In the English sentence: ***How do you go from here to the University***, English speakers will immediately recognize that (1) ***How do you go from here to the university***, is related to a different semantic field from (2) ***How do you go from here to the University***. In the first instance, ***How do you go from here to the University***, stressed you refers to a specific person, the addressee, and fits the traditional category of a second person pronoun. In the second example, ***How do you go from here to the University***, although still categorized by traditional grammarians as a second person pronoun despite its deep structure in the sentence, unstressed you is generated through use of a restricted linguistic code and functions as an impersonal NP. It represents a differentiated alternative for the form one which would have been induced had an elaborated rather than a restricted code been used. The code-switch perceived in English through use of one or unstressed you has no equivalence in Spanish. In English the lexical ambiguity contained in these two sentences is resolved solely at the level of phonology. In Spanish no such ambiguity occurs since the semantic range between the first and second sentence can only be expressed lexico-syntactically: (1) ***¿Cómo va usted de aquí a la Universidad***? and (2') ***¿Cómo se va de aquí a la Universidad***? It is obvious that in the absence of prosodic equivalence between the two languages English phonology, in this instance, is lexico-syntactic for the Spanish speaker.

Consider the following examples: (1) **Se tiene que estudiar para aprender**; (2) **Hay que estudiar para aprender**, and (3) **Usted tiene que estudiar para aprender**. The semantic range distinguished between the first two examples finds no equivalence

in English. Both would be expressed in English (if generated through a restrictive rather than an elaborated code) as: (1) ***You have to study to learn***. In the third sentence, **Usted tiene que estudiar para aprender**, however, what is expressed as syntactically different from **Se tiene que estudiar para aprender** and **Hay que estudiar para aprender** is conveyed in English solely through a change in stress pattern from ***You have to study to learn*** to: ***You have to study to learn***.

In a discussion of distinctions within and between primitive languages J. S. Bruner in an appendix to A Study of Thinking (1957) considers that a range of experience may be differentiated in the lexicon of one language and undifferentiated in another. Although the context of the statements is different from the present, the force of the comment is believed to hold here. The single English lexical form some is differentiated in Spanish through use of the forms unos and algunos: (1) **Tengo unos libros**; (2) **Tengo algunos libros**. On the surface, it would seem the semantic features which have generated these two lexical forms in Spanish are lacking in English since there is only the one form some. On closer examination, however, one finds that the semantic range apparent between the two Spanish lexical forms is communicated in English at the level of stress: (1') ***I have some books*** and (2') ***I have some books***. In the first sentence, unstressed some is the semantic equivalent for the Spanish form unos of **Tengo unos libros**. In both ***I have some books*** and **Tengo unos libros** the possession of books and not their specific quantity is viewed as being the semantically more-important item. In **Tengo algunos libros**, on the other hand, the semantic field perceived through the form algunos, finds its equivalent in the use of stressed some in ***I have some books***. In these two sentences, the speaker views the quantity of books as being more semantically important than the possession of books (although stated less precisely than by

supplying a definite number). In both English and Spanish, stressed or unstressed some in one or the use of unos or algunos in the other reflects an attitude on the part of the speaker. Whereas in Spanish this attitude finds expression at the level of lexicon, in English it is at the level of phonology.

The lack of ambiguity in the following Spanish phrases would have no counterpart in English were it not for prosodic input: (1) **un libro español** and (2) **un libro de español**. Syntactically the two phrases reflect two different semantic relationships. In **un libro español**, the origin of the book is denoted and in **un libro de español**, the subject matter of the book is underscored. This distinction in Spanish can be made only at the level of phonology in English: (1) *a Spanish book* and (2) *a Spanish book*.

A classic example of English prosodics is the sentence: **Visiting relatives bored me**. Non-existent in Spanish at the phonological level are its two semantically viable interpretations: (1) *Visiting relatives bored me* and (2) *Visiting relatives bored me*. Since the use of a present participle with a noun is mutually exclusive in Spanish as is its use as a NP (the infinitive is the nominal form of the verb in Spanish) the English prosodics can only be expressed in Spanish at the level of syntax: (1) **Unos parientes que estuvieron de visita me aburrieron** and (2') **Visitar a los parients me aburrió**.

The importance of prosodics in English as a lexico-signaling device cannot be overstated. Consider the combination of the English forms yellow and jacket. In English it is only a matter of stress that alters the entire semantic range of this combination: (1) *a yellow jacket* and (2) *a yellow jacket*. In Spanish, on the other hand, the English shift in stress finds its equivalency in the generation of completely different lexical forms: **una avispa** and **una chaqueta amarilla**. By extension, such English combinations

of **black** and **berry**, **hot** and **dog**, **black** and **board** would find their Spanish equivalents, not at the level of phonology as in English, but at the level of lexicon.

It is also through stress that the possible syntactic category of a lexical item is often indicated in English. Consider such forms as ***object*** and ***object***; ***permit*** and ***permit***; ***suspect*** and ***suspect***. In Spanish, the semantic component embedded in the English forms would be expressed at the level of lexicon: **oponerse** and **objeto**; **permitir** and **permiso**; **sospechar** and **sospechado**. Moreover, in an ESL learner's speech, the use of a stressed form where the native speaker would use an unstressed form can alter the speaker's meaning in a most serious manner. Consider the following examples: ***I know that cheese is expensive*** and ***I know that cheese is expensive***; ***He's going too fast*** and ***He's going too fast***; ***The teacher asked for questions*** and ***the teacher asked four questions***.

Closely related in English to pitch and stress as semantic-signaling devices is juncture. In the example **night rate**, a pause between the /t/ and the /r/ produces a distinct lexical form in Spanish from a pause before the /t/. Any lexical ambiguity as might result through a misplacement of juncture in English cannot occur in Spanish since the semantic designation of each generates its own lexical forms: **tarifa de noche** and **nitrato**. In such sentences as **it swings**; **they needed rain** or **See Mabel** any change in meaning signaled by a change in juncture would be expressed in all cases at the level of lexicon in Spanish.

In English the conversion of an assertion into an affirmation is accomplished solely through stress with the one exception (excluding the verb to be) that do is inserted if the auxiliary consists only of tense: **I work there** and **I do work there**. In all other instances it is stress alone that is responsible for semantic shift: ***I can do that*** and ***I can do that***; ***I have seen that*** and

I have seen that. In Spanish, by contrast, this semantic transformation is possible only at the lexico-syntactic level through the insertion of sí before the Verb Phrase: (5) **Yo puedo hacer eso** and **Yo sí puedo hacer eso**; **Yo he visto eso** and **Yo sí he visto eso**.

The lexico-semantic differentiation in the Spanish sentences: (1) **No admiten a ningún estudiante** and (2) **No admiten a cualquier estudiante** is arrived at in English through phonology: *They don't admit any student* and (2') *They don't admit any student*. Counter to Spanish, it is the stress patterns in these two English sentences that correspond to the semantic range generated through the forms ningún (any whatsoever) and cualquier (just any) and not lexical equivalence between the languages.

Another lack of level-to-level prosodic correspondence between Spanish and English is in the expression of conjecture, or of possibility, in which implicit confidence is not placed. For example, the English sentence: *John must be home* and (2) *John must be home*. In the first, it is John's obligation to be home and in the second example, it is assumed that John is already at home but one is not certain. The semantic designations embedded in these two sentences as a result of prosodics are conveyed in Spanish at the lexico-syntactic level: **Juan tiene que estar en casa** and **Juan estará en casa**.

Let us now consider the following sentences in Spanish: (1) **¿Está usted seguro de que ha sido él?** and (2) **¿Está usted seguro de que haya sido él?** In the first sentence, the speaker is genuinely seeking information. In the second sentence, on the other hand, the speaker's subjective attitude concerning the information being sought is made manifest at the same time s/he seems to be requesting it. Through the transformation in the Verb Phrase from ha sido to haya sido the speaker projects her/his own doubt

concerning the action of the person about whom s/he is inquiring. In English, by contrast, this would be accomplished not through lexico-syntactic transformations but at the level of phonology: (1') ***Are you sure it was he?*** and (2') ***Are you sure it was he***?

In the English sentence: **John had conferred upon him a great honor**, prosodics make a meaningful distinction on the word had: (1) ***John had conferred upon him a great honor***; (2) ***John had conferred upon him a great honor***; and (3) ***John had conferred upon him a great honor***. The meaning of the first example is that John had conferred the honor to somebody else. In the second John received the honor. In the third John already was in possession of the honor, which had been previously conferred upon him. These semantic changes due to changes in pitch find their equivalents in Spanish only at the level of syntax: (1') **Juan le había conferido un gran honor**; (2') **A Juan le confirieron un gran honor**; (3') **A Juan le habían conferido un gran honor**.

The data presented in this paper suggests the importance for ESL/EFL teachers to consider those aspects of L1 and L2 which are expressed through different components in one or the other language. As has been demonstrated, what is often stated at the levels of lexicon and/or syntax in Spanish is expressed in English only at the level of phonology. L2 teachers have been made aware of the sounds in one language which are totally lacking in the sound system of another language. They have also become aware of sounds which are phonemically distinct in one language but are mere phonetic variants in another language. And they have learned to pay special attention to sounds which occur in both languages but whose distribution, or pattern of occurrence, is different in the two languages. To all these considerations must now be added a heightened awareness of the consequences of the prosodic features of phonology for it is precisely in this area that many lexico-syntactic elements of one language can and do find their semantic equivalents in another.

Consider the formation of the past tense in English. Much emphasis is given to teaching the correct pronunciation of the grapheme ed when introducing the simple past tense to ESL students. Yet very little attention, if any, is directed to the prosodic element responsible for correctly converting the underlying grammatical structure into its accurate pattern of sound. Consider the past tense form of the verb miss. When affixed to a verb ending with an unvoiced consonant phoneme, the grapheme ed is taught as the phoneme /t/, generating the form /mist/. And after some or considerable drilling of the phoneme, many teachers seem to let the matter rest there. Yet in reality, at normal speed, it is not the reception of the final phoneme /t/ that signals the underlying structure but rather it is the nature of the juncture between the VP and the following NP that conveys the semantic switch from Present to Past. Consider these two sentences: **We miss the train every day** (present) and **We missed‖the train every day** (past). Clearly, it is not the production of the phoneme /t/, then, which precipitates the semantic shift, but rather the pause between missed and the NP, the train.

To assume that pronunciation will or can take care of itself is to assume that control of syntax and lexicon to which phonology is inter-related will or can take care of themselves. This rather uneasy conviction on the part of many L2 teachers is due in great measure to a lack of awareness of the true role of the phonological component in the total design of language. To relegate the teaching of pronunciation to specific lessons or time-slots is to ignore how the phonological component of language co-involves every other aspect of the L2 learning process.

The suggestion that teaching pronunciation must be a constant activity in which as much attention is paid to the prosodics of phonology as to the general sound characterization of pronunciation

is apparent from the contrastive data presented in this paper. Only through such an approach to the phonological, syntactic and semantic components of language will the L2 teacher see that what is to be found at one level of analysis in one language is not necessarily to be found at the same level in another. In the same manner that certain phonetic differences in one language become phonemic contrasts in another so can certain prosodic elements in one language become lexico-syntactic elements in another. It is, after all, one of the premises of applied contrastive linguistics that by identifying and explaining the similarities and contrasts between the native and the target language and then explaining or otherwise presenting them to the student L2 learning is facilitated and possible areas of L1 interference are diminished.